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THE SCHOOL NURSE'S RELATION TO THE CHILD APPLYING FOR WORKING PAPERS[1]

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If we briefly review the history of child labor in the United States, we find it coming to us as an inheritance from England. In the fifteenth century England became alarmed at the extent of pauperism in the country and, attributing it largely to indolence, made laws forbidding idleness and advocating the binding out of children of vagrants as apprentices, as early as the fifth year. Later in the same century children of twelve years and older were deported to the colonies, enabling them to support themselves and freeing England from the burden of maintaining the "unprofitable of the realm."

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, an apprentice act was passed "to banish idleness" and it confirmed the idea that children should begin to work at twelve years unless born of well-to-do parents. All the colonies modeled their poor laws after these Elizabethan laws.

As early as the time of George Washington, we find children working in factories in groups rather than as apprentices. In Washington's diary we read of a visit to a Boston factory where he says "They have twenty-eight looms at work and fourteen girls spinning—children turn the wheels for them."

Early in the nineteenth century the first murmur against the factory system for children arose, but from interest in education rather than solicitude for their health. The lack of opportunity for education continued to be considered the chief evil of child labor until after the Civil War.

After the establishment of labor unions, in 1834, there was much agitation against the labor of children on the ground that it underbid adult labor and also with the idea that if hours for children could be reduced it might result in reduced hours for men. In the seventies, labor organizations proposed laws against the employment of children under fourteen years of age; and since that time the demand for legal prohibition of child labor has been general.

At the present time, most of the states have fixed the age for obtaining working permits at fourteen years and demand legal proof of age and ability to read and write English. New York State has gone a step further in demanding that the child be "in fit physical condition to

[1] Paper prepared for the Second Annual Meeting of the National Organization for Public Health Nursing, but read by title only.

perform the work it intends to do." The authority of granting permits has been vested in the health officers of the cities and towns, with great advantage. As this practice will, in all probability, rapidly be adopted in other states, it behooves us as public health nurses to see how we may fit into the plan and we may well study the methods now in use in Rochester, one of the first class cities of New York State.

The direct work of the nurse in helping to fit the child of fourteen or fifteen to enter the industrial world is a link in a scheme which is as yet only partially worked out. The need of the prenatal and postnatal nurse is recognized as vital, but except for the summer infant, welfare work is not yet in operation. This means that the child has reached the age of six years before it comes under the care of the school doctor and nurse. There is a doctor assigned to every public grammar school and nurses are stationed in the schools at the most congested quarters, those from which the greater number of children leave as soon as the state educational requirements are met. Thus many of the children applying for permits have been under the care of the school doctor and nurse for a period of six years or more. There still remains a very considerable number coming from private schools and from district schools in the suburbs who have not had this advantage.

One school nurse is on duty in the Health Bureau and it is to her that every child desiring a working permit must apply. We will not attempt to picture a scene in her office in June, when the little boys and girls crowd the waiting room in scores, but will take a day in the dull season and show the experience of a child who, having reached his fourteenth birthday, promptly leaves school eager, often because of want in the home, not to lose a day in obtaining work. He comes with a school record stating that he has finished at least the sixth grade and that the school register shows him to be fourteen years old. If he is from a public school, he also brings his physical record card on which is recorded each examination by the school doctor as well as a history of infectious diseases and any special treatments or operations. The nurse searches the birth records and finds proof of his age. She then weighs and measures him, tests his vision with the Snellen test card and his hearing with an Acumeter or, if there is a question of it being defective, with an Audiometer. The teeth are then examined and cavities, fillings, missing teeth and the condition of the teeth and gums are recorded. Tonsils and adenoids, goitre, hernia, orthopedic defects, especially flat-foot and curvatures are noted, as is also the presence of a good vaccination scar. A record is made of the diseases of childhood, their severity and the age of their occurrence and of the method by which the child was fed in infancy. The ecomonic status of the family

is noted, the questions covering the occupations of the father and mother and any older children, the number of younger children and the house rent or mortgage.

The boy is now ready for the examination by the doctor who must, according to the law, examine the lungs and heart "with a stethoscope on the bare skin." He also looks over the nurse's record card and, as he sees the need, looks into other conditions. If no gross defects have been found in vision, hearing, heart, lungs or joints, if the teeth have no cavities, and the tonsils are not diseased to such an extent as to retard development and if the child weighs not less than eighty pounds, the physical test is complied with and it only remains for the child to produce evidence that a position awaits him, to obtain the coveted permit.

Now let us see what befalls a child who is physically below par. In the year 1913, when the writer held the position of examiner, 1469 children were temporarily refused permits to work. In about 1232 cases the refusal was because of physical defects. The largest single cause was decayed teeth. A child in need of dental care is referred to his family dentist or, in case of economic pressure, to one of the three dental dispensaries operated by the Rochester Dental Society. A note from the dentist, to the effect that the teeth are in good repair, is required before the permit is issued. If the vision is poor, it must be attended to, either by a regular opthalmologist, chosen by the child's family or at a free dispensary. Here also, unless the child returns with correctly fitted glasses, he is required to bring a note stating that they are not necessary or would not be helpful. We do not require removal of adenoids and tonsils unless the hearing or general health is impaired by them.

The minimum weight is eighty pounds. This will probably be increased, but low as it is, a considerable number cannot meet it. In many cases the nurse finds it necessary to report the child to some charitable society in order that home conditions may be improved or nourishing food supplied. For instance, an orphan boy living with a tuberculous sister was found to weigh less than sixty pounds; a home was secured for him in the country. On the other hand heavy, sluggish children with a tendency to flat foot are often held up until in good condition.

Whenever possible, one parent is requested to come with the child and much interest is shown in the examination.

The question might be asked, "Is there not much difficulty in enforcing such strict rules?" Very little. Occasionally parents apply to their alderman or even to the mayor and requests come from politicians asking that a child be given his permit at once and be allowed to receive

dental or other needed care later. Invariably the answer is, "No," and it is generally known that there are no exceptions. This seems to be slowly leading to an effort on the part of the parents to anticipate the requirements.

WEATHER TOPICS

By M. W. CURRAN, M.D.
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"We were received entirely without ceremony by the Prince Consort who conversed very pleasantly with us and I must say that there was never more got out of the weather than we managed to extract from it on this occasion."—*Correspondence of John Lathrop Motley.*

Weather records and impressions are always at variance and, conversationally, the weatherwise bulk large in any circle. If language is used to conceal thoughts then weather topics are discussed to avoid touching upon other subjects, hence it is well to be posted as one frequently has to take refuge in weather topics. With this short digression we will plunge into the midst of things.

Meteorology proper treats of the weather and its causes and of the physical laws involved, including the instruments by which the phenomena are observed. The difficulty of writing on such a subject lies in its magnitude. For our purposes brevity demands restriction to the science of Climatology or the science of climate which is a branch of Meteorology.

Climate is the permanent or average state of any locality with regard to atmospheric conditions, such as temperature, moisture, winds, cloudiness and precipitation as distinguished from weather which regards only conditions that may obtain momentarily. Weather is the current or passing state of the atmosphere, especially the conditions which affect man and his interests. It differs from climate which represents the average of these conditions or the average of all weathers.

Climate changes slowly but weather is constantly changing. There may be days of sunny weather in a foggy climate or of rainy weather in a foggy climate or of rainy weather in a dry climate.

The atmosphere surrounding the earth may be considered as an ocean of air extending upwards for about ten miles from the sea level of the earth's surface. Its greatest density is nearest the earth's surface by reason of its having to support the weight of its whole depth. It gradually becomes less dense as the distance from the earth increases. This law of decrease of pressure being known, it is used as a means of measuring the height of hills and mountains. Air has weight which we do not